COMMONWEAL

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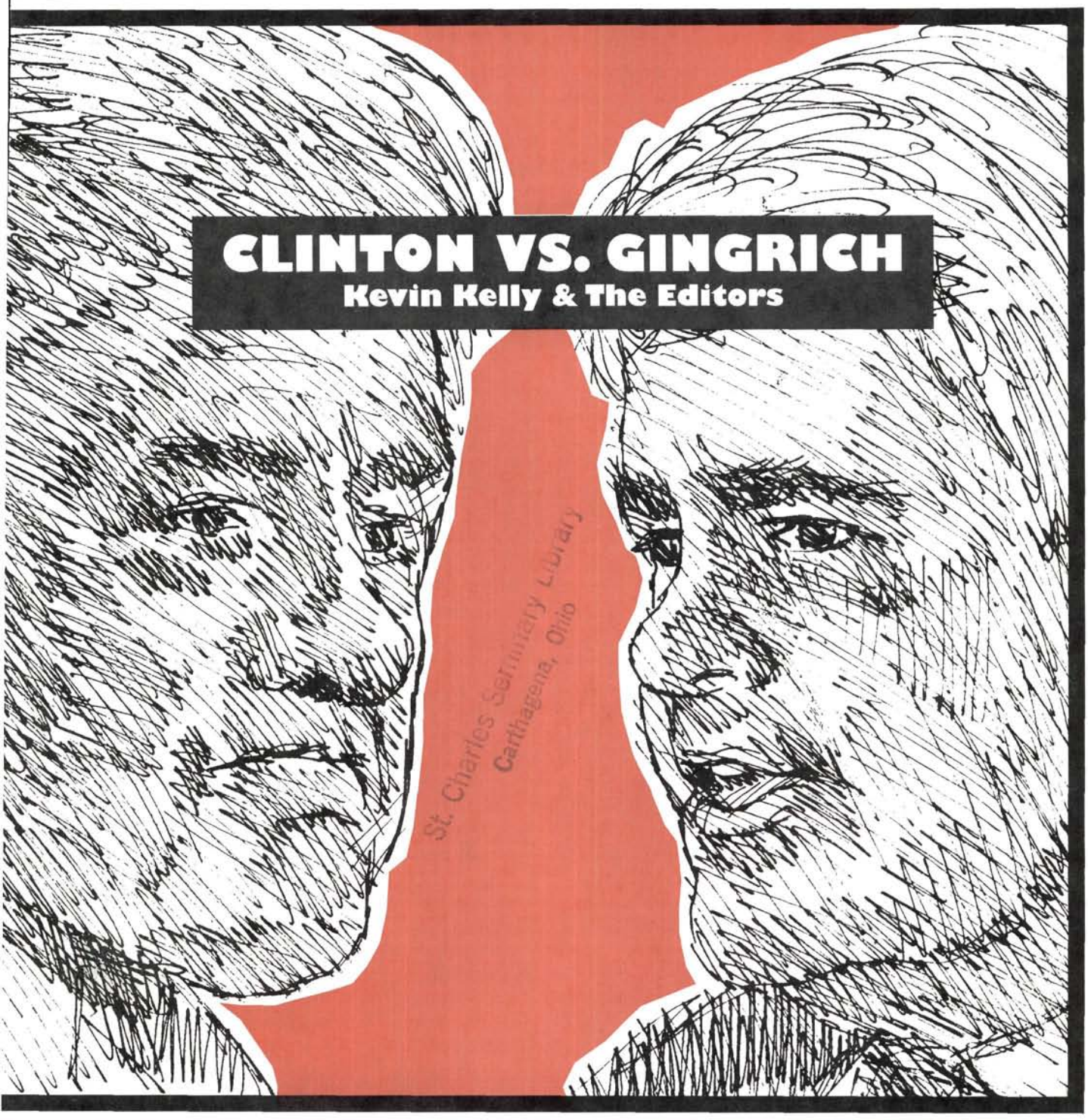

CLINTON VS. GINGRICH

Kevin Kelly & The Editors

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To the Editors

Bitter, worldly, arrogant

Your editorial ["Responsum dubium," December 1] is deeply offensive. For you to accuse the pope of inflicting wounds on the body of Christ is to claim both an authority of knowledge and a moral superiority which I profoundly doubt you have. The editorial also reveals a lack of hope, moderation, and toleration.

The church in its capacity for its own governance has the potential to bring the issue that so troubles you to resolution. Whatever that resolution may be, the issue itself may have depths and complications not yet clear.

Your bitter, arrogant epistle is in a worldly spirit that I can easily find elsewhere. If it can be arranged conveniently, please see to the cancellation of my subscription. ROBERT J. FAHEY
Rye, N.Y.

From the editors: Additional letters on this and related topics will appear in the following issue.

It wasn't Dorothy Parker

Odd coincidence. This afternoon I read a chapter heading from Father Clifford Howell's *Of Sacraments and Sacrifice*: "How odd/of God/To choose/the Jews." Howell ascribed the verse to G.K. Chesterton. We all know that Hilaire Belloc coined it. Now, reading David Carlin's column in the issue of January 12, I find the quote attributed to Dorothy Parker. It has a way of getting around.

BROTHER DON FAHRIG, S.M.
Cincinnati, Ohio

It wasn't Chesterbelloc

I'm afraid David Carlin made Dorothy Parker a bit more cerebral than she really was by crediting her with "How odd/of God/to choose/the Jews." It was really our old friend William Norman Ewer who wrote it—but he never does get recognized for it. THOMAS M. CURRAN
Auburn, Ala.

From the editors: Research inspired by these letters established, first, that for some reason *Commonweal*'s sketchy library includes 19 (!) volumes of collected quotations (including two of Chestertonian aphorisms); second, that only one of them, *The Oxford Book of Quotations*, tells us who wrote "How odd"; and, third, that it was indeed Mr. Curran's old friend who penned those lines.

Including women out

David R. Carlin, Jr. argues that the October 28 *Responsum* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, though it may offend our sense of rationality, is no more shocking than the God of all humanity having a chosen people.

I am afraid that in this context, "chosen" is poorly chosen. In the *Responsum*, choice of males means exclusion of females. Israel's status is quite otherwise. God's choice here binds a special people to its covenantal partner, but does not bar his other children from the divine compassion. Consider Isaiah 19:24-25: "In that day, Israel shall be a third partner with Egypt and Assyria as a blessing on earth; for the Lord of hosts will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be my people Egypt, my handiwork Assyria, and my very own Israel.'" HENRY G.J. BECK
Winchester, Va.

D. Day & N. Gingrich

I was appalled to read of the attempt by one Bill Kauffman and the American Enterprise Institute to turn Dorothy Day into a "Neocon Saint" [January 12]. Everyone of my generation who writes against poverty owes a debt to her, Peter Maurin, and their *Catholic Worker*, where they wrote it all first.

My first impulse was to ask whether Mr. Kauffman and his Institute have no shame, but then I wondered whether they are just not smart enough to tell the difference between Day's anarchism and Newt Gingrich's corporate pandering.

HERBERT J. GANS
New York, N.Y.

Most wars get blessings

Gordon Zahn's "An Incomplete Confession: German bishops forgot their blessing on Hitler's wars" [December 15, 1995] is brilliant in its concise evaluation of ecclesiastical complicity. But the Christian prophetic voice is not now and never seems to have been notable in the hierarchy, except for its Johnny-one-note on abortion. Otherwise, one might have expected protest against the denigrating body counts of Vietnamese or the demonization of Iraqis in the Gulf War. So far as I remember, no prayers were offered for Iraqi or Vietcong soldiers or the hundreds of thousands of civilians, God's children and members of the human family, who were carpet-or-otherwise-bombed-or-napalmed. During World War II, one heard no hierarchical protest over the Allies' embrace of "total war" mania, leading to obliteration of German cities because they were "enemy" and because we believed we could shorten the war by indiscriminately killing the aged, women, and children in Ham-

(Continued on page 4)

CORRECTION ■ Unfortunately, an editorial addition meant to enlighten may have caused confusion in Mary Lee Freeman's review of Kevin Coyne's *Domers: A Year at Notre Dame* (January 12, 1996). Coyne's previous work, *A Day in the Night of America* (Random House, 1992), was not "about high school football in a small Texas town" but about Americans working the night shift. No doubt *Commonweal*'s editors were thinking of *Friday Night Lights: A Town, A Team, and a Dream* (Addison-Wesley, 1990), also a highly acclaimed work, but authored by H.G. Bissinger, not Kevin Coyne.

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COMMONWEAL

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burg, Berlin, Dresden, Hiroshima, and all the rest: The end justifies the means. Calls for apologies become embarrassing when you see that the finger must be turned toward all who blessed the bombers and all (including myself) who assented to these evils by silence. ROBERT BROPHY

Los Alamitos, Calif.

Senser on the mark

Robert A. Senser's "Loaded at the Top" [December 1, 1995] was on the mark. Corporate greed takes many forms but recently tries to gain respectability through buzzwords like downsizing, reinventing, TQM, reengineering, and the like. Yet corporations and institutions that have already slid down those slippery slopes have not shown any improved performance nor the expected savings nor windfall profits. Instead, morale is down and careers are wrecked. Meanwhile, those at the top continue to profit. Fifteen years ago, CEO compensation averaged forty-two times that of the average worker. Three years ago (latest figures available), following waves of layoffs, CEO compensation rose to 157 times that of the average worker. Something's wrong here. WILLIAM M. LAWBAUGH

Frederick, Md.

Senser's fantasy

Re: "Loaded at the Top," by Robert A. Senser [December 1,1995]. Mr. Senser's vocation? I assume that his personal experience was not in business ownership or management. When I read generalized conclusions arrived at by people using gross statistics, I fear that this great country is in danger of losing its economic freedom to centralized government control.

What has happened to the freedom to succeed or fail? When the stemwinder of a business increases its earnings and net worth, should he not be rewarded? If he fails to do so, he risks his job (as he should).

The error of Mr. Senser (and of Secretary of Labor Robert Reich) is the assumption that the workers are responsible for increases in productivity. The overwhelming reason for increases in productivity is the capital investment by management into machines/methods that minimize the limitations of man (error and speed). Capital expenditures must be justified prior to authorization; the principal justifications are savings in labor and waste and increases in the rate of production.

Average wages tend to decrease with the displacement of high-wage jobs. Who is responsible to offset the average decrease in wages? The employer? The government? Or the workers?

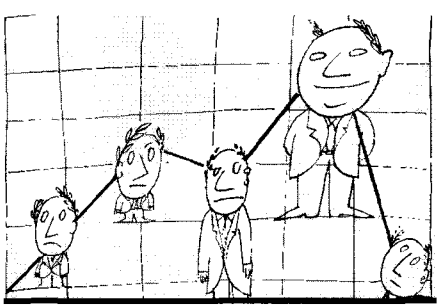
We, as God's children, have been blessed with certain talents. Learning skills come easy to some, with difficulty to others. But ultimately our marketable skills depend upon the efforts of the individual. The idea that the world (company, union, government) owes us a certain standard of living is pure political fantasy.

DON CLEARWATER

Redding, Calif.

The author replies:

Mr. Clearwater does not make a case against the main point of my article—that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening to a disturbing degree. Instead, he brings up points designed to justify the growing disparity. He bases part of his approach on the assumption that capital investment by management in technology is the "overwhelming reason for increases in productivity." This starting point leads him easily to the view that management deserves all it gets and that ordinary workers should not expect to depend even on their own companies for a certain standard of living. Workers had better rely on the talents that God gave them and on their ability to learn marketable skills, or else forget it. Charles Darwin, welcome to 1996.



Even under contemporary conditions, improving the rate of productivity of a company, as well as of an industry and an economy, depends on far more than technology. A dynamic interplay of much else is involved: worker creativity and commitment, job environments conducive to work, a sound distribution system, marketing skills, research in basic science and technology, patent protection, infrastructure creation and maintenance, quality education, law and order, appropriate tax and lending policies, and so on down a long list of conditions, some linked to government assistance or regulation.

Obviously the efforts of many individual human beings, using skills that have upgraded their God-given talents, are important at every point. But the question is this: Are some favored individuals and groups able to exploit their positions of power, as well as access to and influence over government resources and policies, to accumulate exorbitant rewards for themselves, while leaving many millions of workers, in the United States and elsewhere, short-changed or utterly deprived? Look at the mounting evidence. Read the business pages and business magazines. ROBERT A. SENSER

Endorsing indecency

I strongly urge you to find a movie reviewer whose standards will not allow tacit endorsement of total vulgarity and indecency.

On the basis of Richard Alleva's fa-

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Political default

In spite of the drama of presidential vetoes and congressional brinkmanship, the Battle of the Budget is not exactly a clash of Titans. Skirmishing policy wonks looks more like it. To almost everyone's surprise, including his own, it was Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) who blinked during what everyone expected was the budget endgame at the turn of the year—a game the Republicans felt destined to win. Well into 1996, there is still no end, and still no budget. According to a series in the *Washington Post* (January 19-22) on the budget negotiations, Gingrich, taken by President Bill Clinton's charm and limitless gift of gab, was convinced that the administration would ultimately give way to Republican budget-cutting pressures. But those pressures backfired. Forcing the government to close down two times was not a good idea. The Republicans have paid dearly in internal dissension and public disgruntlement. Furthermore, if in the next several weeks they also force the federal government to default, thereby terrifying the bond market, they will find themselves deemed doubly irresponsible—not your traditional Republicans!

But if the Republicans have not won, neither have they lost. Should the legislation behind the Republican budget eventually prevail, it will change the way Americans govern themselves. Devolution to the states in the form of block grants, the end of entitlements, and cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, and welfare may mean a smaller federal government, but not necessarily a smaller, more efficient government over-all. In this issue, Kevin Kelly examines how well, and how poorly, states do in managing and administering what are, after all, national programs (see page 14). It is not yet clear how fifty state governments will do better at what is now being done by one, the feds, especially when the states will have fewer dollars. Not that devolution to the states is objectionable in itself. The critical issues are those of fairness, justice, and responsibility for the common good. Welfare reform experiments in states like Wisconsin and Michigan are still experiments. How will minimal standards and guarantees be established and maintained when all fifty states are "experimenting" with welfare? It is hard to see how this can be done without an important role for the federal government.

Sounding like a good moderate Republican in his State of the Union address, Clinton declared that "the era of big government is over." At the same time, he defended sharing burdens and responsibilities. We cannot, he said, "go back to an era of fending for yourself. We have to go forward to the era of working together—as a community, as a team, as one America."

The Republicans argue to the contrary: power and responsibility should be returned to states and to individuals. But is that what their programs will finally achieve? If local control were what the Republicans are really after, not states but cities and counties would be the more obvious choice for block grants. Sending block grants to the states sets up a "race to the bottom," a politics of competition among states and within states over who will *not* care for the most vulnerable—the poor, the elderly, children, and the sick and disabled—while handing the levers of power to special interests that have always wielded undue influence in most state houses. The reforms of the Progressive era, the New Deal, and the War on

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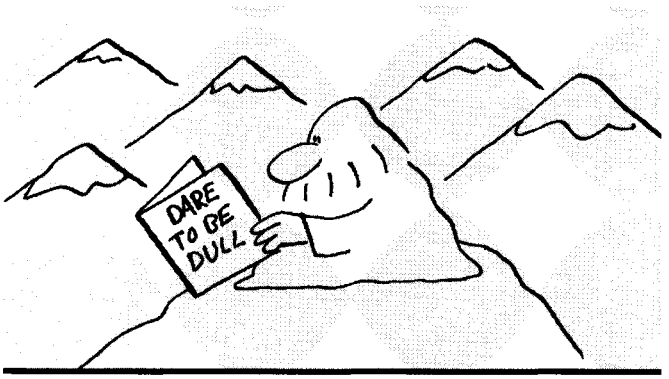
Poverty helped to contain that kind of abuse and to redress the inequalities of political power, education, and employment opportunities among the states. What merit is there in returning to a system of proven corruption and failure?

When it comes to dollars and deficit reduction, there may not finally be much difference between the Clinton budget and the Gingrich budget (though the "Blue-Dog" Democrats' budget, which seems to take the best and reduce the worst of both budgets, may offer the basis for a reasonable compromise). But Clinton is holding out for something else. It is the principle of federal government itself—its proven ability to protect individuals, especially the most vulnerable, and to counterbalance the power of the powerful.

The revolutionary 104th Congress is less about smaller budgets than about reconfiguring the balance of power in the United States. Clinton and Gingrich seem to agree that that question should be left to the American people in next November's election. That makes sense, if Democrats and Republicans alike will campaign on that basis. In the meantime, a budget is needed for a federal government that the shutdowns have succeeded in showing to be more, rather than less, necessary.



ET CETERA

SPICY IS OUR MIDDLE NAME ■ *Commonweal*'s very high profile and even higher tone continue to draw comment. Early in November we got ourselves mentioned in both the *Nation* (November 6) and the *New York Daily News* (November 3). Even if backhanded, we'll take the compliments.

Howard Kissel, drama critic for the *News*, found much not to like in *Sacrilege*, Diane Shaffer's play about the ordination of women. "A play," Kissel wrote, "is not a debate, and much of what Shaffer has her main character [an activist nun] preaching might be better in a letter to *Commonweal*."

Preaching in a letter to *Commonweal*? Perish the thought.

At the *Nation* "Media" columnist and Republican scourge Barbara Ehrenreich judged John F. Kennedy, Jr.'s new "political" magazine *George* to have reached unimagined depths of banality. "I would pick up *George*," Ehrenreich writes, her razor-sharp tongue deeply embedded in cheek, "hack around in the lush undergrowth of ads searching for a page of print, and then find myself, a half-hour later, gazing at the wall and longing for a nice spicy issue of *Commonweal*."

Ehrenreich obviously missed our swimsuit issue. And what about that article on the pastoral care of woodlice?

OF SEVERAL MINDS

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

IS BLACK WHITE?

Seeing purple

Dear Cardinal Ratzinger,

If you instruct us as loyal Catholics to submit in mind and will to the "infallible" teaching that women cannot be ordained priests, you must also tell us how to accomplish this feat. What *exactly* do you mean for dissenters to do?

I remember how affronted I was by the words of Saint Ignatius in his *Exercises*, "If we wish to proceed securely in all things we must hold fast to the following principle: What seems to me white, I will believe black if the hierarchical church so defines."

But this is not the sixteenth century, and you are a brilliant theologian living in a post-Vatican II church, serving a pope who regularly proclaims the sanctity of conscience and the dignity of the human person. So what do you envision as the mental and spiritual processes that we, the dissenting faithful, are supposed to follow?

If we look to Scripture, we can only agree with the 1976 Papal Biblical Commission that unanimously decided that Scripture alone supplies no basis for decreeing that women should not be ordained. If we look to the work of eminent theologians and mainstream scholars, we find many more advocates of women's ordination than instances of those who defend the ban. When the few arguments on your side are presented, they seem unconvincing. They rest mainly on past precedents. Even worse, they advert to vague ideas about gender imagery and complementarity that imply men and women must have different vocations for service in the church.

Surely you admit that the argument from tradition, or negative evidence from silence seem strange in a church that has always heralded revolutionary good news and proceeded to change the world. "Behold I make all things new," says the Lord. The "different natures" and gender-complementary arguments seem even odder and more contradictory under a pope who constantly preaches the equality of men and women in both church and world. The pope even apologizes to women for past church abuses. So you both apologize for a dreadful past and yet appeal to this "unbroken tradition" for support in the present.

The contradictions and inconsistencies in your position explain why most Catholic theologians, and even some

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bishops, have judged that it would be most faithful to the Holy Spirit to ordain women now. The American laity agree. Because of forty years of prayer, study, worship, and meditation upon the question, I am convinced in conscience that it is God's will that women should be ordained.

In this impasse, your instruction that I submit my conscience and believe what you define to be true becomes psychologically impossible, in effect a moral suicide. I can do no other than wholeheartedly believe what faith, reason, heart, expert counsel, and the experience of a lifetime tell me to be true and in accordance with Christ's desires for the church.

Do you think there is some separate faculty or piece of me that could stand outside of my deepest self and somehow force or will the rest of me into self-deception? Admittedly, I'm a coward, and faced with the rack I might pretend, or lie. But I could never really believe that this instruction is an infallible teaching, a part of the deposit of faith equal to the creed and other central truths.

You may well reply, "Since you admit weakness, be truly humble and grant that by our office and authority, we in the Vatican are divinely guaranteed to be infallible in what we define to be the Roman Catholic faith. And, by the bye, you are always free to join some other Christian church."

True, but the same wholehearted conscience that makes me challenge this instruction also compels me to firmly adhere to the Roman Catholic church and believe in the crucial importance of the Petrine ministry. In my chauvinistic Catholic way (well, I am a convert) I am convinced that Christians need to be in communion with the pope and rock of Peter in order to be in the fullest communion with the whole gospel tradition. When one separates or leaves in protest, I'm afraid there is a tendency to become lopsided, puritanical, fixated, or fly off in lightweight, New Age directions. I believe in the weight and breadth of our Roman Catholic unity and communion, but not in your current interpretation of what this unity entails.

So I have a counter-proposal for you. Let's quickly exercise our prudential Catholic gift for selective amnesia and overlook your instruction. We can discern it to be one of those null proposals which fail to be received or confirmed by the church as effective teaching, and certainly not as infallible.

In fact, let's take this occasion to collectively become more humble and rethink our disagreements over this troubling and divisive question of infallible church authority. Why should any of us, in office or not, be so absolutely sure that we know Christ's will with such exact certitude? Why not only virtual certitude or high probabilities, which demand risk and personal commitment? How can faith be faith if it claims epistemological certainty?

Honesty forces us to admit that the church has changed its definitive teachings over and over again—in regard to liberty of conscience, the Jews, crusades, slavery, usury, torture, the papal states, and hundreds of other petty and embarrassing blunders made in misbegotten claims of certitude. I know, some apologists try to wriggle and squirm heroically in order to show that these errors either didn't happen or can be reinterpreted in ever more convoluted and subtle ways; or they retreat to the truth that our problem is only (!) that the church is made up of sinful humans.

If we take a developmental view seriously, maybe an exaggerated claim of infallibility and an excessive need for certitude will go the way of baby teeth—to be discarded in the maturing process. They will not be seen as necessary since the church no longer believes that God damns to hellfire pagans, unbaptized babies (Augustine), or those sincerely holding erroneous beliefs. Neither will exaggerated concentrations in a centralized authority be required when local subsidiarity matures in the church.

So, dear Cardinal Ratzinger, I heartily agree with you and the pope in your affirmations of the wondrous reality of God's Truth and the belief that eternal moral truths exist within the good news of the gospel. But we disagree over how we should proceed to seek Truth or what claims we can make for certitude. Baron von Hügel, in the midst of the bitter modernist controversy, said that "he accepted whatever the church had finally committed herself to." Well said, but then there is no known "finally," in an ongoing human journey to God. We follow the One who is the Alpha and the Omega. And the One who forever says, "Come!"

Sincerely yours in Christ,
SIDNEY CALLAHAN

OF SEVERAL MINDS

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

TEACHING VALUES IN SCHOOL

Which ones? Whose?

There is much talk nowadays about the need for public schools to teach moral values. In a society which, for thirty years, has been drifting downriver toward the Niagara of moral anarchy, there is no doubt about it: somebody needs to teach moral values to the young. But can the public schools do it? I doubt it.

Leaving aside a number of other difficulties, let's focus on the vexed question of *whose* values will be taught. Will the schools teach liberal or conservative values? Values of self-expression or self-control? Values rooted in religion or in secularism? Values of individual autonomy or of community?

Now there happens to be a standard way of trying to meet this difficulty. It is argued (by Bill Bennett, for one) that, no matter what our moral disagreements, all Americans share many important values. We may, for instance,

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disagree about sexual questions. But so what? Sex, after all, isn't the whole of morality. Everyone agrees that fairness, honesty, courage, and respect for others are good qualities, while unfairness, dishonesty, cowardice, and disrespect are bad. These lists of noncontroversial good and bad qualities, these virtues and vices, can easily be extended. We agree, for instance, on certain values enshrined in the United States Constitution: the rule of law, a republican form of government, democracy, due process, equal protection, freedoms of speech, press, assembly, religion, etc. So let schools teach a broad range of noncontroversial values while maintaining a prudent silence about the narrow range of controversial questions.

Note well, we are told, that this sensible policy does not mean that children will learn nothing about controversial matters. Far from it. Parents, churches, and other nonschool agencies of socialization will be quite free to give instruction on such issues. According, then, to this common-sense division of labor, schools will teach fairness and the Bill of Rights while parents and churches will teach about adolescent sex. The Smith family and their local Southern Baptist church will teach abstinence, while the Jones family and their local Unitarian church will teach safe sex.

As an abstract proposal, this seems reasonable. But as usual, the devil is in the details.

Take teen sex, for instance. Most parents already teach that this is wrong, especially for girls. But to judge from sociological survey data, not to mention sky-high rates of adolescent pregnancy and STDs, such teaching is often not very efficacious. We hear parents say they would like schools to teach "moral values." Translate this into English, and you'll find that what they usually mean is that they want the schools to help them in the difficult job of inculcating sexual restraint in their kids. A values curriculum that keeps silent about adolescent sex will evoke this response from parents: "So what's the point? If you don't plan to say anything about teen sex, why are you doing this at all?"

But if the schools rise to this challenge and decide to tackle the sex question, they're right back in their original quandary. Should they take an "abstinence" approach or a "safe sex" approach? If the latter, they'll outrage moral and religious conservatives; if the former, they'll outrage moral liberals and secularists.

Or consider fairness. We all believe in fairness as an abstract principle, but what does it mean in practice? What does it mean, for instance, when applied to divorce? Or when applied to social policy questions, like affirmative action, food stamps, Medicare? Or when applied to abortion and euthanasia? If the essence of fairness is respect for the rights of others, then everything depends on what rights others actually have. But this question of rights, like sex, is highly controversial. Some people favor this list of human rights, some that list, others a third.

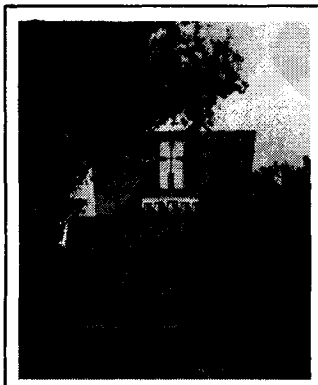
Maybe the schools will respond to this dilemma by saying: "Our fairness curriculum will teach kids not to cut in line and not to steal one another's pencils; but we'll take no stand on divisive questions like divorce, social policy, abortion, and euthanasia." But this is tantamount to teaching that fairness applies to small matters only, not to big matters. Once again, what's the point?

Alternatively, the schools might say: "On controversial questions like divorce, affirmative action, etc., we'll teach nothing as to *content* , but we'll teach a *method* of approaching the issues." But which method? It is not just moral answers that are controversial; so are methods of answering moral questions. Some people search the Scriptures. Some consult the new Catholic catechism. Some rely on intuition. Some look for help from social scientists (who are in notorious disagreement among themselves). Most simply adopt the prejudices of their social peers. Whichever method schools adopt, they will give offense.

At first glance, teaching values enshrined in the U. S. Constitution seems promising—until we remember that the most divisive issue in the nation today is the question of abortion. The Supreme Court says the Constitution includes a right to abortion. But according to many legal scholars plus a large and intense section of public opinion, it includes nothing of the sort. As they see it, the 1973 *Roe* decision was a constitutional bonehead play. So what are the schools to say about this?

Perhaps, making the usual move, they will say: "We'll note in passing that the abortion question is highly debatable, but we'll focus our attention on nondebatable aspects of the Constitution, like trial by jury, *habeas corpus*, etc." To which I can imagine a morally conservative parent replying: "Thanks for nothing. My real worry is that my daughter Susie, growing up in a society in which the Supreme Court condones abortion, may someday decide to kill her unborn child. I am not worried that she may someday decide to abolish *habeas corpus*."

Schools can be effective moral teachers when they represent communities that are morally homogeneous. The trouble is, American society is no longer a morally homogeneous community. □



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Mary Pat Kelly

FROM ZAGREB TO MOSTAR

A Bosnian Journey

The fighting had stopped in Bosnia. At Split airport the lines of UN peacekeeping troops were heading out, while civilians like ourselves were moving in: reporters, aid workers, pilgrims headed for Medjugorje, businessmen—all very purposeful, but also very normal looking. The British television producer who carried a flak jacket and helmet received a lot of condescending smiles. Even Martin and I exchanged an amused look that said, "What a self-dramatizing Johnny-come-lately. Doesn't he know the shooting is over?"

We had just come from three days at the Intercontinental Hotel in Zagreb. Already we were experts, as insouciantly casual about risks as the most war-weary correspondent. Cosseted in a beautiful (and reasonably priced) room, we breakfasted in a dining room where waitresses insisted that we sample the multiplicity of pastries. The reality of what had happened to the people of the former Republic of Yugoslavia was hard to grasp. We had long conversations with military men who had been in grave danger, who had lost comrades in the conflict. We heard desperate stories of refugee displacement from members of the International Rescue Committee, whose offices stayed open during the worst sieges of Sarajevo and Mostar. But when you're gesturing for another fruit tea or pilsner as you listen, there is a distance between reality and the stories about the reality.

Not that Zagreb did not contain its own testimony to loss. The relatives of the dead and missing have painted the names of loved ones on bricks and improvised a two-block-long wall in front of the headquarters of UNPROFOR, the UN peacekeeping force. Candles and flowers keep vigil in front of sections where place names appear again and again: Vukovar, Sarajevo, Mostar. "Some spit on the flag of the UN when they come to pray," the Swedish UNPROFOR guard tells me from his position surrounded by sandbags. "They blame us." He shrugs, "We tried."

But the war is over, and all these people have made it through alive. Zagreb itself is celebrating in a subdued way; it has the sense of a city edging toward a boom. A street of cafes and bars has neon shamrock signs, courtesy of Guinness.

When we fly from Zagreb to Split, the starting point for a trip to Knin and Mostar, we have come to expect war, but with all modern conveniences. With a relaxed attitude born of our "war" experience so far, we boarded the train for the three-hour trip from Split to Knin. There would be a tourist office in Knin to hook us up with a place to stay. We'd have a nice dinner at a local restaurant, and tomorrow start asking hard-hitting questions of the Croatian army spokesman. We wanted to hear the inside story of the push that reclaimed Knin from the Serbs in August 1995. In 1991, the local Serbs had created a separate country, the Republic of Serb Krajina; that, by some interpretations, is what started the war.

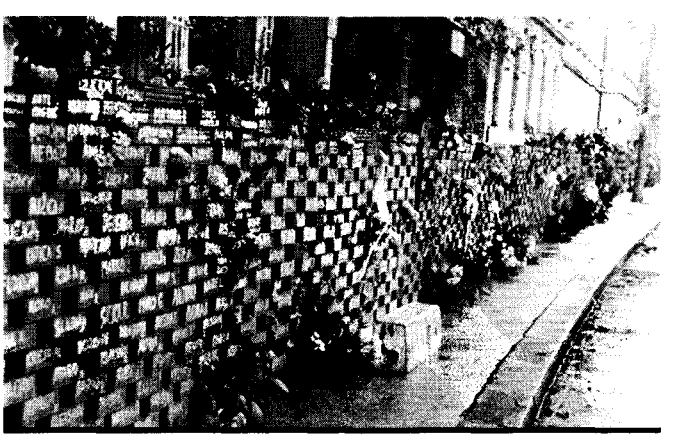
The first jolt of reality was our fellow train passengers. Many were young men in camouflage dress and quite a few were drinking. There were some civilians, among them a few women and children, and a lot of shopping bags filled with giant-sized detergent boxes. The conductor came for our tickets. "What time do we get to Knin?" we asked.

A voice from the next bench said, "Seven o'clock." The speaker was a little girl of eleven or twelve, blonde, with glasses. She leaned across a young dark-haired woman and spoke to us. "Seven," she said, "or seven-and-a-half." And so we met Anna. She had learned her English from a German couple. She wriggled in her seat and laughed as we used pantomime to expand our common vocabulary.

"Where do you live?" she asked. "What age have you? What is your husband called?" The questions rushed out of her. The schoolbook sentences couldn't quite contain her energy and her curiosity. Laughing filled in for any missing words. Why was I going to Knin? I mimicked writing. And where was I staying? We would find a hotel. "Hotel?" she repeated. "No hotel," she said. Then she turned and spoke quickly to her mother. "My mother says you will stay with us." "Thank you," I started, "but"—except that no "buts" were allowed. After two hours of playing cards, singing, telling stories, there seemed no reason to say no.

"It is a big house, but far from the station," Anna warned. "No problem," I thought, "we'll treat them to a taxi ride." "We'll take them out for a nice dinner," Martin said.

It was dark when we arrived in Knin. The gentle drizzle on the coast at Split was a heavy cold rain in the mountains. There were no lights in the station; as we got closer I saw there were no windows either. A small hotel, a nice B&B? What had we been thinking? This town had been blown apart. Broken glass littered the sidewalks and through the gaps where walls and windows had been we could see the empty shells of a market, pieces of furniture in a restaurant. There was nothing but darkness and the rain. Groups of soldiers passed, and I was very glad we were walking with Anna and her mother. The rain let up, but icy puddles filled potholes. These potholes had been made by shells. We saw no



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moving cars, but many abandoned ones—some flattened by tanks, others burnt. Dogs barked, and we started up the hill into what Anna said were the suburbs.

We came to an intact villa with three stories and a balcony. Anna's grandmother opened the door. She could not quite conceal her surprise, but Anna and her mother were both explaining. By now we realized that if they hadn't invited us we would probably be under interrogation at the police station, or on the train back to Split. I was not about to start in with, "Now if this is any trouble, we'll be happy to go." For Anna, we were like oversized kittens and she couldn't wait to show us off to her grandparents. She settled us adults into the only heated room and started to host the evening. No one bothered with small talk; through Anna, we got down to the story so common in this part of the world.

Her Croatian grandparents, who were in their mid-fifties, came from Vares, a village about thirty miles north of Sarajevo. Anna's mother had left to go to the university in Sarajevo and study economics. She met her husband, also a student, and they married and had Anna. But then....

Anna had been sent to Vares when things got bad in Sarajevo, then Vares came under attack and she fled with her grandparents. Word came that her father had been killed. Somehow her mother had gotten to them, and the four of them spent the next year moving from camp to camp, finally ending up in a place they called "the barracks." A few months ago they had been assigned to this house where Serbs had previously lived.

Adult elaborations on the flight from Vares, the time spent in the barracks, the grandmother's fear that if she returned to Vares, now in control of Bosnian Muslims, she would have to wear a veil—all were passed through Anna. Finally she announced herself exhausted. If she was to continue, we all would have to pay her for this work. Her grandfather, silent during all this talk, now said something. The women laughed. "He told me he doesn't have to pay. He said nothing," a delighted Anna said.

Now we had to eat. First, special cakes for Saint Nicholas Day. "Bosnian," her grandmother said, and all repeated so there was no mistake, "Bosnian cakes." The cookies commemorated a Christian saint, but they had the heavy, dense sweetness of Middle Eastern desserts, and the coffee was poured from the kind of one-handled pot common in Jerusalem. "Bosnian style," they said again and again. Then we went into the dining room for a meal, eggs fried—Bosnian style.

We slept downstairs on a pullout sofa bed in the living room filled with cabinets displaying crystal glasses. Our pillowcases were embroidered. But by whom? And whose glasses were those? The Croatian family that had welcomed us or the Serbian family who had abandoned it? And the cakes, the coffee, the eggs were Bosnian food. Nor did they pronounce Bosnia as we did; it was "*Bohsnia*," with an open vowel that echoed beyond us into a place that was far away, and lost.

The next day, the Croatian colonel told us "the Serbs fought as they could," when I asked if he was surprised that the Krajinian Serb army had not put up more of a battle. Most had simply removed their uniforms and joined the refugees. The colonel had come late to military life and had no interest in waxing eloquent about the fine points of strategy or in bragging about his army's victory. In fact, he preferred to talk about his years on the boats that lugged cargo around the Great Lakes and through the Saint Lawrence seaway.

Outside of town at the UN Force Headquarters, Colonel Shawn Tymchuck said, "There was no battle. The Croatians arrived and the Serbs left." The Croatian army and their Bosnian allies had prepared their offensive for a year, but "a small number of very determined defenders would have stopped them in their tracks for a long period of time," says Colonel Tymchuck. "It didn't happen."

From the headquarters above Knin, the countryside spread out. When the area had been in control of the Krajinian Serbs, the UN had monitored the few Croatian villages. Now they were trying to help the Serbs that remained, mostly old people.

For Tymchuck the most heartening dimension of his whole experience has been the cooperation he's seen among nations in their peacekeeping tasks. UN forces were under siege here at this camp. The Krajinian Serbs were antagonistic toward the U.N. When NATO bombed Udbina airfield nearby, they had been attacked.

"Every morning when I brush my teeth I look at the holes in the trailer." A Nigerian soldier had been shot in the head and his vehicle stolen. But now the colonel was heading back to Canada. He did not think any of the remnants of armies in Bosnia or in the Krajina would challenge NATO troops directly. But how could there be reconciliation in a town where no one who is now there had lived there before? He answered with another question: "We had people living in our compound who were in mixed marriages—how did they decide who they were?"

Mixed marriages were very much on the mind of the aid worker that took us into Mostar the next day. Our guide was the son of a mixed marriage, true of 60 to 70 percent of the marriages in the area. "How then do you identify who you are? How did anyone?" I asked. I was afraid the answer was going to be "religion." "It's something like that," he said. But then he told us how Mostar used to be one big family. "The people who are here now," he said, "are not from Mostar. They have come in from the villages around and taken over the town. The people of Mostar fled."

As in Knin, we asked ourselves will a year of peace give these people a chance to rebuild and to reconcile? "We're waiting for spring. Good weather will test the peace," said a member of NATO Commander, Admiral Leighton W. Smith's, staff. But will it last? To this question all factions answer: "It has to." □

Mary Pat Kelly, *writer and filmmaker, traveled with the press corps covering President Clinton's visits to Ireland and Germany, from where she traveled to Croatia and Bosnia. She was accompanied by her husband, Martin Sheerin, who took the accompanying photographs.*

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LEAVE IT TO THE STATES

And it won't get done

Kevin Kelly

By the time the Clinton administration put forth its balanced-budget plan in early January, it was clear that the stalemate in Washington wasn't about slashing the federal deficit. Both the Republican and Clinton plans would wipe out federal red ink in seven years. Yet, the two sides remain as far apart as ever, and with good reason. For while the Clinton plan cuts funds (and essentially maintains the *status quo*), the GOP package is the most radical fiscal document the nation has seen since the Roosevelt administration. The centerpiece—block grants to the states—effectively demolishes large portions of the New Deal, returning to the states power over vast sections of social policy that for decades have resided solely with legislators in Washington.

Why the shift? Republicans, playing on the popular notion that the federal government is too large, contend that states will be more responsive to people's needs. They also point to a long record of balanced state budgets—largely the result of local laws that ban deficits—and policy innovations in areas like welfare reform, to argue that states are better at governing than the debt-laden, stodgy federal government.

For evidence, Republicans point to governors like New Jersey's Christie Todd Whitman. When she arrived in office two years ago she promised to slash New Jersey's income tax by 30 percent over three years. Last year she achieved her goal—a year ahead of schedule. Whitman delivered the tax cut, worth $444 million so far, while holding state spending increases to 1.7 percent a year, down from over 8 percent during previous years. To top it off, New Jersey should post a budget surplus of over $540 million in fiscal 1996, thanks in part to streamlining which reduced the state's payroll by almost 5 percent. Now Whitman is bulldozing ahead with a welfare-reform program that will force recipients to look for work.

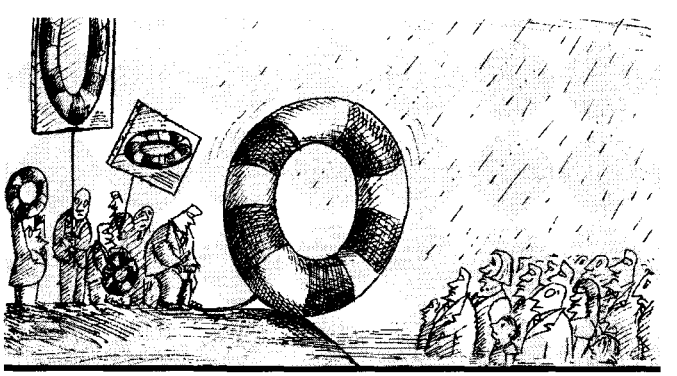
It may be no surprise that congressional Republicans, as they prepare to cede control over everything from welfare to transportation to environmental policy to the states, have found ready allies in politicians like Whitman. She insists that her fellow governors can do a better job than Washington. "I'm looking forward to an era when states really are laboratories of democracy," she says

It's easy for politicians to make such pronouncements. Governors like Whitman are frequently long gone before the consequences of their passions become apparent. And the easy embrace of this latest states-rights movement is no exception. While governors and state legislators will end up with a lot more power, they also will be forced to make do with much less money than the feds ever imagined possible. The fiscal crunch won't come for several years—the budget cuts proposed by the GOP are graduated and don't bite until year three—but when they do, coping will require a level of ingenuity and financial acumen that even state executives like Whitman haven't mustered.

Just what are the Republicans asking the states to do? Their 1996 budget hands responsibility to state lawmakers for dozens of major programs, the two most important and costly being welfare and Medicaid. Congressional Republicans desperately want the statehouses to do something they won't—make the tough decisions needed to balance the federal budget. While Congress is willing to give the states more responsibility, it plans to unleash them with a lot less funding. Congress plans to freeze federal funding of social programs for five years, no longer permitting such entitlements as Medicaid and welfare to increase lockstep with need. Spending would plummet 30 percent in the case of Medicaid and welfare, or nearly $270 billion between now and the year 2002.

The impact of the reforms can't be underplayed. The 1996 Republican budget, if enacted, demolishes the federal role as protector of the poor, leaving that responsibility to the states. They will have to make do with what they've got, economizing by shifting Medicaid users into managed-care programs, and setting limits on how long people can stay on welfare.

There's a huge overriding problem with the scheme. It won't work. The states are not up to the task. While state coffers are currently flush, thanks to three years of robust econom-



Kevin Kelly *is a writer living in Oakland who has written on state finance for* Business Week.

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Tom Furlong

In the South Bronx

Knee deep in broken brick
and splintered glass,
a girl no more than nine
hopped out from an empty lot,
and asked a stranger in the street,
"Who made this?"—the fragrant flower
she'd plucked from the weeds and sniffed,
white petals brushing her black cheek.
"God did, for you," he said,
and she curled her lips up
toward the corner of her eye,
inclined her head, and smiled,
weighing the evidence at hand.

ic growth, most states face large deficits early in the next century, the result of rising health, education, and prison costs. Minnesota, for instance, running a surplus today, will shoulder a $2.5 billion deficit by 2005, according to a recent study done by University of Minnesota economist John Brandl. Few governors expect block grants to cover the expenses associated with programs like Medicaid; most are already pondering such difficult options as cutting spending on higher education and economic development. Worst of all, no state possesses the infrastructure to run much beyond small experiments to reform welfare. Even the most celebrated of those experiments—like Wisconsin's Republican Governor Tommy Thompson's workfare program—haven't been around long enough to determine whether they actually work or not.

Perhaps the most flawed premise of "devolution" is the notion that the states are more efficient delivery vehicles for services than the federal government. How many states can boast about their oversight of public education, long the most important program under their control? Over twenty states are under court orders to reform their child welfare systems. And state supervision of existing block grants leaves much to be desired. The Job Training Partnership Act, for instance, distributes around $1.6 billion to the states for youth and adult job training. But critics charge that half the program's funding goes for administration. Many of the training efforts are flawed—at best. In one instance, Illinois paid a car wash to train new employees—for six months.

The states aren't the paragons of innovation their supporters boast about, either. During the 1930s, governors, unable to cope with the Depression, turned to the federal government. Three decades later the feds had to enforce civil-rights codes. Even recent reform efforts seem to be less the product of original thinking than a tendency to copycat. Every governor who has overhauled a welfare system during the last two years has followed a basic recipe: strict time limits on benefits and a requirement that recipients work. Medicaid reform is no different. The state solution to rising costs has been to shift recipients into managed-care programs like health maintenance organizations. Still, even limited Medicaid reforms seem to tax the strength of some states. When Ohio won a federal waiver to begin shifting 41,000 Medicaid patients in the Dayton area into managed-care programs, the Ohio Human Services Department claimed patients received better care than ever. However, it had no way of knowing that, since the state didn't collect comparative data: doing so was too expensive. Ohio now admits the experiment, which state officials once promised would deliver big cost savings, proved "budget neutral." And the Kaiser Commission on the Future of Medicaid has found that Medicaid managed-care programs typically cut costs by only 1 to 2 percent, and this is largely because elderly and disabled Medicaid enrollees are excluded. Care for these groups, which constitute only 30 percent of Medicaid's participants, accounts for over 60 percent of spending.

The 1996 Republican budget creates block grants—essentially bags of cash—which the states can spend as they see fit in areas as diverse as transportation and welfare, leaving the details to the states. For instance, the federal government would send the states $124 billion to spend on Medicaid in the year 2002, as opposed to the $178 billion the feds had projected paying if they continued to run the program. States would be free to spend this money without the broad guidelines currently imposed by the federal government. Republicans say this approach will save Americans $182 billion between now and 2002, a savings of 30 percent. This assumes the states can slow the rate of Medicaid growth from 10.5 percent today, to 4 percent in 2002.

But there's a huge fiscal catch. Since state Medicaid payments won't be matched by the feds as they are now, if the states can't figure out how to cut their rate of growth to 4 percent, they'll be unable to get any more help from Washington. It's a tall order. States-rights advocates bet the states will be able to cut enough waste and fraud to close any potential funding gap—a questionable assumption. Says Indiana's Democratic Governor Evan Bayh: "Congress simply wants to shift the burden of the deficit to state and local government."

That could spell disaster for the states. Most states rely on the feds for over 33 percent of their revenues. The cuts contained in the 1996 Republican budget could cost the states more than $360 billion from 1996 to 2002, forcing deep spending cuts or tax increases. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington-based think tank, figures New Jersey will lose some $350 million in federal grants in 1996 thanks to the new budget. The losses grow exponentially until 2002, when cuts of $2.9 billion hit. Adding it all up, New Jersey would lose $11 billion in federal aid over the next seven years. Tax-cutter Whitman could easily find herself reversing course within five years. Most likely that task will fall to her successor.

Block-grant backers point to current state budget surpluses

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to back up their claims that the states will manage. Indeed, over the last three years state balance sheets have been extraordinarily healthy. According to the National Association of State Budget Officers, states posted a surplus of $20.2 billion last year, a contrast to the $203 billion federal deficit. But governors can largely thank the economy for their surpluses. Since the Republicans haven't repealed the economic cycle, most economists figure deficits loom once a recession slices tax receipts and increases demands for social spending. By and large, states haven't saved for these rainy days. Heavy doses of tax cutting—twenty-eight states cut taxes last year—and big spending increases for wages and education have left states vulnerable. "Most states aren't well prepared to deal with the coming problems," says Urban Institute state finance expert Steven D. Gold.

Don't expect any big savings from welfare reform either. At least that's the lesson from experiments undertaken so far. For instance, California's Greater Avenues for Independence program (GAIN) has successfully moved many welfare receipents into the workforce by providing them job training and job-search help. Those who participated in the program saw their incomes rise, while Aid to Families with Dependent Children payments fell. A study of GAIN by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation said that over three years the average earnings of participants jumped 22 percent above AFDC recipients who didn't enter the program. Participants also received $961 less in AFDC payments.

But GAIN didn't save California a dime. To move people off welfare California spent an average of $4,515 per participant on such things as job training. Indeed, three of the six counties studied chalked up *losses* when costs were set against welfare savings. The message: Unless states dump people on the streets, reform is costly.

Worse yet, many governors fret that the rush to cut the federal deficit could undercut reforms that have a chance of working. Oregon's much praised Medicaid managed-care plan is one of the potential victims. Since its inception in 1994 the Oregon plan has extended health care to an additional 120,000 people, mainly the working poor who lack medical insurance but don't typically qualify for Medicaid. The state's Medicaid director, Hersh Crawford, says it's not possible to limit cost increases to 4 percent by the year 2002, especially with Oregon's disabled population growing 10 percent annually.

The effect of Medicaid cuts on providers is clear in states that have already embraced drastic reforms. Hospitals in Tennessee have seen their payment rates drop around 70 percent thanks to the state's managed-care Medicaid plan, TennCare. Because of falling reimbursement rates, the Regional Medical Center in Memphis finished 1995 with a deficit of over $10 million, and is thinking of closing a unit that cares for critically ill babies, the only facility of its type in a Memphis-area public hospital. As frightening as these cuts are, they're the likely future under block grants.

So why would anyone, let alone a governor, support the Republican block-grant scheme? Undoubtedly some proponents believe devolution would work. Ambitious governors clearly relish the power that comes with federal funds. But the GOP attraction to state power is also in the math: thirty states are currently run by Republican governors. Block grants have also been devised to pit traditional Democratic constituencies against each other. Displaced workers, for instance, would have to fight with welfare recipients for their share of job training funds. The infighting could cripple the programs and divide the Democrats.

But the deeper danger of devolution lies elsewhere. Trapped between escalating social costs and budget-cutting demands, governors may simply throw up their hands. Worse still, angry voters who swept Republicans into power two years ago expecting change may grow even more cynical about society's ability to help its least fortunate.

What's likely, in this scenario, is what Harvard University professor Paul Peterson calls "a race to the bottom." States would start making it more and more difficult for anyone to get welfare or Medicaid benefits, with legislatures competing to come up with the harshest program. Since under the new block-grant scheme, levels of federal aid would no longer be tied to how much states themselves were spending, politicians could slash away with vastly diminished concern about any federal reaction. Block grants "could be an empty victory," sighs Indiana's Bayh. Soon enough we may find out. □

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PROCLAIMING THE CATHOLIC FAITH

The scope & limits of pastoral ministry

Richard R. Gaillardetz

Several years ago in *America* (May 2, 1992) magazine, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels argued that the recent polarization of both the left and right within the Catholic church was doing great harm to the church as a whole. One group of Catholics frequently caught in the crossfire between extremists from both wings are professional pastoral ministers. Pastoral ministers (ordained and non-ordained) must negotiate a veritable minefield of contentious issues, but must do so under the special pressures and obligations incumbent upon them in their particular ecclesial role.

Not infrequently, these ministers are called upon to respond to members of the church and other inquirers into the Catholic faith who, for one reason or another, are struggling with a particular church teaching. As *public* ministers, they are conscious of their responsibility to present faithfully doctrine as visible and formal representatives of the church. Their role is not identical with that of the professional theologian, whose work is often more speculative and exploratory in its methodology and tentative in its conclusions. As *pastoral* ministers, they want to honor the real struggles of those to whom they minister. They know well that they are ministering to adults who are often highly educated and accustomed to forming their own views—views which they expect to be taken seriously. I believe that successful navigation of this minefield is possible only after considering very carefully the specific responsibilities of the public minister within the Roman Catholic church. With this in mind, I would like to propose four basic responsibilities incumbent upon every public minister in the presentation of official church teaching.

First, every minister has the responsibility to present the official teaching of the church comprehensively and sympathetically. This should be so obvious as to require no further comment. However, I am convinced that there is a great deal of misunderstanding regarding what this responsibility actually entails.

No minister within the church has the authority to offer an expurgated version of the Catholic faith. There is often the temptation to ignore those teachings which may present difficulties either for the minister or for the laity. This temptation is understandable. Many faithful ministers are not equally comfortable with every teaching of the church. In this situation, there is a tendency to avoid the topic altogether for fear of being in the position of (1) questioning church teaching in public, (2) defending church teaching without conviction, or (3) presenting the teaching in a superficial or haphazard fashion.

For example, I recently had a conversation with a priest ordained almost thirty years who said, with obvious pride, that he had never publicly addressed the issue of contraception. It was obvious from his comments that he had serious difficulties with the church's doctrine. He is certainly not alone. However, is there not a latent form of paternalism here which assumes that the minister knows better than the one being ministered to which official positions of the church are correct and which are not? The minister must remember that not everyone will share his/her personal difficulties, and that everyone has a right to a clear, comprehensive, and sympathetic presentation of church teaching. For any minister to edit the church's teaching because of personal difficulties is to let his or her own judgment replace that of those being instructed.

Besides this latent paternalism, there are other factors which I believe contribute to a selective presentation of the Catholic faith. One important factor is the poor theological formation of ministers, including many clergy. Too often a minister will struggle with an official teaching of the church because of inadequate theological formation. Teachings on Mary, eschatology, Original Sin, eucharistic real presence, sexual morality etc., are often ignored because the minister finds popular/traditional treatments (which is to say the kind of treatment one might find in preconciliar catechisms or seminary manuals) of the subject less than persuasive. Proper theological formation and ongoing education for ministry are essential. The teaching of the church must be presented in language and concepts intelligible to the modern educated Catholic.

The responsibility to present that teaching *comprehensively* risks being misunderstood if it is conceived as simply going through a checklist of doctrinal propositions and moral norms. We should recall Pope John XXIII's injunction at the

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opening of Vatican II that the church must penetrate to the heart of its teaching. Rote memorization and repetition of formal doctrinal propositions are not catechesis. Doctrinal statements and specific moral norms are summary statements, "bottom line" summations of a rich theological tradition. Ministers require formal theological training precisely so they can go beyond the mere repetition of doctrinal propositions and moral norms. For example, contemporary models of catechesis in the catechumenate rightly begin, not with doctrinal propositions but with the liturgy, liturgical calendar, creeds, and lectionary. This leads us to the second responsibility of the public minister.

Public ministers must be mindful of the hierarchy of truths. In the *Decree on Ecumenism* (11), Vatican II recognized a certain gradation among church doctrines:

> Furthermore, in ecumenical dialogue, when Catholic theologians join with other Christians in common study of the divine mysteries, while standing fast by the teaching of the church, they should pursue the work with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility. When comparing doctrines with one another, they [theologians] should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or "hierarchy" of truths, since they vary in their connection with the foundation of the Christian faith. Thus the way will be open for this kind of friendly emulation to incite all to a deeper awareness and a clearer manifestation of the unfathomable riches of Christ.

The decree is not just referring to the distinction between church dogma and authoritative but nondefinitive doctrine. Rather the council was primarily referring to a hierarchy which exists among the dogmatic teachings of the church. According to the council, all dogmas must be interpreted and presented in the light of their relationship to "the foundation of Christian faith." Since the foundation of the Christian faith determines the ordering of these dogmas, the council's references to "the divine mysteries" and "the unfathomable riches of Christ" suggest that the foundation of the faith lies in the economy of salvation, what God has done for us through Christ and in the Spirit. This was in fact the substance of the apostolic *kerygma* of the early church. It is reflected in the early creedal confessions and continues to be encountered most profoundly in the church's liturgy. The obligation of the minister to present church teaching comprehensively means more than going through a shopping list of propositional statements drawn from Denzinger or even the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; it means faithfully presenting the ancient apostolic *kerygma* which was centered on God's work of salvation on our behalf. All dogmatic teachings must be placed in the context of this economy of salvation. It follows that a comprehensive presentation of the Catholic faith need not involve an exhaustive articulation of all the church's various dogmatic pronouncements. Avery Dulles writes:

> Few if any believers explicitly know everything that the church, through its magisterium, has taught and teaches as divinely revealed. For the ordinary believer, who is not an expert on the history of doctrine, it suffices to adhere explicitly to the central truths of Christianity. These are well known from familiar passages in Scripture, from Christian preaching and catechesis, from the creeds (which summarize the central articles of faith), and from the liturgy (which celebrates the great mysteries of faith in the annual cycle of feasts and seasons) [*The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, Oxford, 1995].

We must remember that the church's motive in promulgating dogmatic definitions was rarely if ever catechetical. It was usually a formal response to specific, historically situated attacks on the apostolic faith. A comprehensive presentation of the Catholic faith should not be confused with a comprehensive presentation of every dogmatic statement ever promulgated.

The third responsibility of the public minister is to make explicit, when appropriate, the binding character of a particular teaching. Not every teaching is equally binding on the consciences of the faithful. This is so because the church itself does not propose each teaching with the same degree of authority. The neoscholastic manuals acknowledged this in their use of theological notes (for example, *de fide definita, sententia fidei proxima, sententia theologice certa*) to specify a teaching's authoritative status. Unfortunately, these distinctions were often considered of mere academic value. Many

John Kinsella

'Imitamini Quod Tractatis'

For Priests in These Difficult Times

The day you were called
to break bread for a living
was the day you were called
to be broken.

The days you spend
bending over bread
are spent
bent around a mystery of fraction.

If you are indeed broken,
you need to gather up
each other's fragments gently,
and remember how,
again through you,
He feeds so many
with so little.

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insisted, (and many still do today) that the faithful need not be informed of the authoritative status of a teaching for fear of encouraging a "cafeteria Catholicism" where Catholics feel free to reject any doctrine which has not been proposed infallibly. Too often in contemporary preaching and catechesis there is scant consideration of the important gradations of authoritative church teaching. André Naud (*Le magistre incertain*) has referred to the ecclesiastical reluctance to make these distinctions as *le mal catholique*, the Catholic malady. This attitude suggests yet another kind of ecclesiastical paternalism. Yet these distinctions have developed within the Catholic tradition out of the recognition that not everything the church teaches is divinely revealed. Consequently, with regard to the church's authoritative but nondefined teaching, there is at least a remote possibility of error. Where such a remote possibility exists, the faithful cannot be asked to give an assent of faith. To ignore these distinctions is to ignore the fundamental difference between an act of faith and the religious *obsequium* of intellect and will which Vatican II (*Lumen gentium* 25) proposes as the appropriate response to nondefinitive, authoritative doctrine.

How does the minister determine the theological note or authoritative status of a church teaching? In church tradition, the responsibility for assigning a note to a particular teaching generally fell on theologians. Obviously, this meant theologians who were "in good standing" in the church. These theologians would assess the form in which a teaching had been proposed (for example, solemn definitions might introduce a dogmatic statement with "I/we solemnly define and declare..."), the authoritative status of the document (for example, a constitution, encyclical, apostolic letter), the historical context, and the frequency with which it had been taught. Theologians would then offer their judgment regarding the teaching's status, and that judgment would be included in theological manuals and catechisms. The fact that this practice is no longer as common as it once was does create special difficulties.

Of course, the determination of the authoritative status of a teaching must always keep in mind canon 749.3, "No doctrine is understood to be infallibly defined unless it is clearly established as such." I interpret this canon to mean that the burden of proof lies with the magisterium to proclaim clearly when a teaching is a dogma of the faith, and to substantiate clearly that claim. Failure to do so can result in the kind of ambiguity I believe is still present regarding the church's teaching on the ordination of women, even with the CDF's recent statement. (I cannot consider the important but relatively technical questions which need to be addressed regarding the CDF's recent *Responsum ad dubium*.)

Offering guidance to those who struggle with church teaching is the fourth responsibility of the public minister. Church teaching is not simply one voice in the marketplace of ideas; for Catholics it has a formal authoritative or normative role. Ultimately, however, all of us must actualize our conscience in concrete decisions for which each of us will alone be responsible before God. This understanding of the role of conscience was highlighted at Vatican II. In the *Decree on Religious Liberty* (4), the council taught that "the Christian faithful ought to *carefully attend* to the sacred and certain doctrine of the church" [italics added]. A number of bishops proposed an amendment in which the phrase "...carefully attend to..." would be replaced by the passage "...ought to form their consciences according to...." The theological commission responded that "the proposed formula seems excessively restrictive. The obligation binding upon the faithful is sufficiently expressed in the text as it stands." The public minister must be mindful of the fact that he or she is presenting the teaching of the church to responsible moral agents who alone will have to give or not give an assent to a particular teaching.

During the four centuries between the Council of Trent and Vatican II, the teaching ministry of the church was conceived in largely juridical terms. In the sphere of church discipline an obedience of the will is demanded. This kind of obedience generally requires only an external assent in which a person can freely obey a law of the church as long as there is no conflict with some more vital moral obligation. To take a mundane example from civil society, when driving on the highway I may come across a 65-mph speed-limit sign. I do not inquire after the "truth" of this law, but merely whether I can obey it without violating some other greater priority (for example, bringing my wife, in the final stages of labor, to the hospital). In the post-Tridentine church, this juridical view of authority was extended beyond the sphere of canon law to apply as well to the church's doctrinal teaching. But this extension of the juridical view overlooked important differences between an authority which promulgates law and an authority which *proclaims* church doctrine. In the latter case the proper paradigm is no longer command/obedience but proclamation/*response*. The church proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ and invites a response from the believer. This response involves more than just an act of the will; the believer must inquire after the *truthfulness* of this teaching as well. The character of church doctrine demands that one strive toward not just an external assent but a true internal assent. Belief cannot be commanded, one is invited to belief in response to the proclamation of the gospel. Pope John XXIII himself recognized this difficulty

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in his homily at the opening Mass of Vatican II:

> At the outset of the Second Vatican Council, it is evident, as always, that the truth of the Lord will remain forever. We see, in fact, as one age succeeds another, that the opinions of men [and women] follow one another and exclude each other. And often errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun.
>
> The church has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by *demonstrating the validity of her* teaching rather than by condemnation.

In the post-Tridentine, juridical view of teaching authority, the role of the minister in the face of controversy and/or disagreement with church teaching was straightforward; he simply commanded obedience to all church teaching. However, as we recognize that the proclamation of church doctrine demands a true *internal* assent, the role of the minister in the face of controversy and/or disagreement becomes more complicated. What are the obligations of the minister in this new situation?

The first factor concerns the pastoral setting. For example, I do not believe that the liturgical homily is the place to attend to controversial matters. The homily is to be devoted to the proclamation of the word of God, and its subject matter is dictated by both the lectionary and the liturgical calendar. The eight- to ten-minute framework of the average homily precludes any sophisticated treatment of controverted doctrinal issues. Even the treatment of controversial matters or challenges to church teaching in other public settings (for example, during a catechetical presentation as part of the R.C.I.A. process or in some other adult education program) requires considerable pastoral sensitivity. In general, when a serious difficulty with or challenge to a church teaching occurs, the minister should briefly (1) present the teaching of the church as clearly and sympathetically as possible, (2) acknowledge honestly when there is some theological disagreement on the matter, and (3) offer a clarification of the authoritative status of the teaching. However, participation by the minister in serious, protracted debate over a church teaching is best avoided in this public setting. Where serious personal disagreements emerge in a public forum of this kind, the diversity in people's personal faith journeys combined with often significant differences in theological background invite misunderstanding. One-on-one pastoral counseling offers an atmosphere much more appropriate for dealing with these serious personal difficulties.

In the context of pastoral counseling, the minister is better able to assume a stance not unlike that of the spiritual director. The task of the good spiritual director is to help the directees recognize the signposts in their particular journeys of faith: It is not to chart their spiritual path for them. Where indi-

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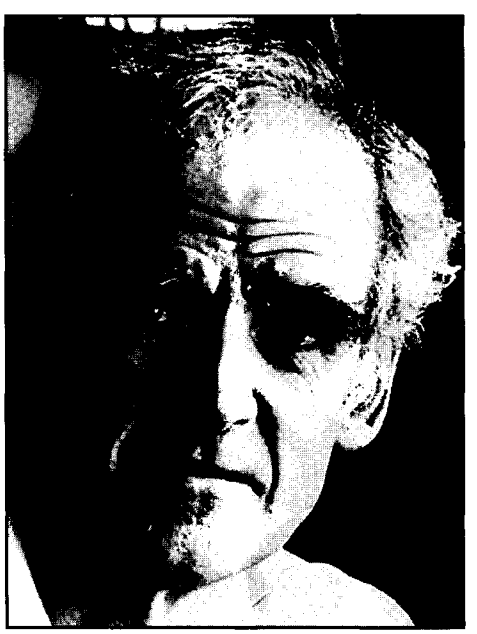

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viduals come to a public minister with questions or difficulties regarding a church teaching, it is the task of the minister to guide them in the process of achieving internal assent. This assistance or guidance must be clearly differentiated from the kind of paternalism reflected in the attitudes of many ministers on both extremes of the ideological spectrum.

The concrete guidance of the minister certainly includes the sympathetic presentation of official teaching. This generally includes offering the theological arguments proposed in support of a teaching. It may also be helpful to acknowledge opposing arguments while stressing that these arguments do not possess the same authoritative character. Second, the minister must clarify the authoritative status (or theological note) of the particular teaching. Are we dealing with a central dogma of the faith (for example, the bodily Resurrection of Jesus) or with a particular church teaching which, while authoritative, would have a significantly different status (for example, the church's position on tubal ligation when a woman is medically unable to bring a pregnancy to term). Obviously, difficulties regarding the first example would be much more significant than those related to the second. Third, the minister can invite the individual to an examination of conscience in order to ascertain whether the difficulties lie in a fear of the conversion which assent to a particular teaching (particularly in the area of morality) might demand. Finally, the minister can invite the individual to assess his or her attitude toward the authority of the ecclesiastical magisterium. In our society, particularly in this country, it is easy to fall prey to an attitude which sees any exercise of church authority as archaic or out of step with the times.

Having completed this process, the minister has fulfilled his or her responsibility to assist in the proper formation and examination of conscience. The decision to give or withhold assent is placed where it rightly belongs, with the person who has the difficulties with the given teaching. It is possible that those with whom the minister is dealing will not want to assume their proper responsibility. They may want the minister to give them permission to reject a certain teaching. Let me say quite bluntly: this permission is not the minister's to give. On the other hand, neither is it the place of the minister to pronounce judgment on the ultimate spiritual consequences of a failure to arrive at internal assent (for example: "If you do not agree with the church on this matter you stand in peril of your salvation"). No minister, from the pope to the parish catechist, is empowered either to *command* assent to church teaching or to *dispense* from that assent, and no minister is empowered to pass formal judgment on the ultimate *spiritual* consequences of a particular stance toward church teaching. Of course, one must distinguish between the ultimate spiritual consequences of an inability to arrive at internal assent and the *ecclesial/canonical* consequences. There are clear church guidelines that dictate that a public and obstinate rejection of a central dogmatic teaching of the church (generally those which we profess in the creeds) may separate someone from the Roman Catholic communion. On the other hand, where the failure to arrive at internal assent is concerned with an authoritative but non-definitive doctrine (for example, the prohibition of artificial contraception) a failure to arrive at internal assent, if this follows from a properly formed conscience, would not necessarily separate one from the Roman Catholic communion. Indeed, this withholding of assent, sometimes called legitimate dissent, must be viewed as a valid exercise of the fundamental obligation of all believers to seek after truth and to accept the consequences of that search.

Finally, the permissibility of withholding assent, in these carefully defined circumstances, must not be viewed by the minister as a mere act of condescension to human weakness and error. Because the magisterium itself grants the possibility of error in the proclamation of authoritative doctrine, the dissent of believers, if it follows from the process outlined above and from a spirit of respect for the authority of the church, may positively assist the church in recognizing its error and moving forward in pursuit of the "plenitude of truth." This possibility cannot, in principle, be denied to the "ordinary believer." The great nineteenth-century theologian, Cardinal John Henry Newman, was fond of citing the early Arianist controversy as an example of the laity, often at odds with the views of their bishops, helping to preserve the orthodox faith. Though lacking the professional credentials of the theologian, every baptized believer possesses a supernatural instinct of the faith (*see, Lumen gentium*, 12) and therefore has a vital contribution to make to the church's corporate discernment of God's Word. In other words, we must acknowledge the real possibility that legitimate dissent itself, whether by the professional theologian or the "ordinary believer," may be a manifestation of the Spirit bringing the whole church to truth. Clearly there are instances of dissent which are ill-considered and public expressions of dissent which reflect a divisive, confrontational spirit. However, the tendency of some to view *all* forms of dissent as acts of disobedience or disloyalty is the unfortunate consequence of the polarized ecclesiastical climate of today.

In the end, the ultimate responsibility of the public minister within the Catholic church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as it finds expression in the Roman Catholic tradition. The minister proclaims church teaching comprehensively, sympathetically, and in a pastorally sensitive manner. At the same time, the minister must always remember that responsibility for responding to that teaching lies with another. Every minister prays that he or she might be an instrument of the Holy Spirit. But that same Spirit works through those who seek to make the teaching of the church *their* own, and their struggles, their often courageous attempts to grapple with the demands of church teaching, also constitute a valuable contribution to the life of the church. □

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Frank McConnell

HOW 'SEINFELD' WAS BORN

Jane Austen meets Woody Allen

Being Irish, I think it's important always to have a few really good reasons to be depressed—otherwise you'll start feeling good about stuff, and when you do that, you *know* the cosmos is going to put out the drop line on you: the disposal will back up, the pilot light in the furnace will go inexplicably out, you'll get a solicitation in the mail from the Psychic Friends Network, whatever. Paranoid/neurotic? Yeah: it is the way of my people.

By the way, this is a piece about "Seinfeld."

So: among the allowable reasons to be depressed at this point in time are the economy (especially in California); the recent death of Roger Zelazny, a great science-fiction writer and an entirely lovely man; the presence of Ricki Lake on TV; and, if that isn't enough, the fact that this is very probably the penultimate season for "Seinfeld," which did as much or more for TV comedy as the now-mythic, now-available-on-reruns "Mary Tyler Moore" show did in the seventies.

"A show about nothing": that was the catch-phrase for "Seinfeld" that got generated—probably with the enthusiastic help of some PR guys from ABC—in its first season. Set in Manhattan—still, after all these years, the real psychic capital of America—it traces the meanderings of four people through their lives, four people who happen to share an addiction to the same mediocre neighborhood diner, the same anxiety about their lives' futures—and mutual affection. Nothing *does* happen in most of the episodes, in fact, except for quibbling and quarreling among the four major characters. A show about nothing? Actually it's a show about bumbling: bumbling the way you and I bumble through our days, years, lives, always expecting that the moment of crisis, *kairos*, The Great Turning Point, is just around the corner. And it never, dammit, is: sound familiar?

I love "Seinfeld" because it's funny as hell; and, more, because it's funny in a way American sitcoms didn't manage to be funny until this thing came along. "Sitcom": think about the word. "Situation Comedy." From "I Love Lucy" and "The Honeymooners" down to the abominable "Married...with Children" and the blandly pleasant "Coach," the sitcom is about ordinary folks getting themselves involved in extraordinary, absurd pickles, and clawing their way out: slapstick in the living room. "Seinfeld" follows that formula—after all, this is TV, the most unrelenting formulaic mode of storytelling ever—but follows it with a difference. In "Seinfeld," the situations are ordinary—you lost the watch your mother gave you and she's coming to visit, or you were caught making out with your girlfriend during *Schindler's List*—and the characters are extraordinary: articulate, witty, self-conscious, and as neurotic as a cadre of waltzing mice. The show's premise is that life is predictable, but we are excessive in our response to it: we used to call this "realism."

The center of the show is Jerry Seinfeld, a struggling stand-up comic, played by Jerry Seinfeld, a struggling stand-up comic and the show's main writer and co-producer. His friends are Elaine (Julia Louis-Dreyfus), an ex-lover and now good pal who has perennially rotten luck with men; George (Jason Alexander), balding and insecure at mid-life, who has rotten luck with women; and Kramer (Michael Richards), of the weird hair and explosively clumsy body movements, whose personal chaos seems somehow always to leave him standing upright while the other, far more rational three usually end in various postures of defeat or discomfort.

As I said, the comedy here isn't dazzlingly unprecedented. "The Dick Van Dyke Show," "Mary Tyler Moore," and "Bob Newhart"—with, still, the fastest and sharpest dialogue ever on the Tube—all these, and of course "Cheers" and of course "Taxi," anticipated the brilliance and (important word) *civility* of "Seinfeld." But none quite achieved its special tone.

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And that tone is best described in the old phrase, comedy of manners. No kidding: if "Seinfeld" has a Muse, a patron goddess, it sure is—surprised as the writers might be to hear it—Jane Austen.

I said that the sitcom is basically slapstick in the living room (remember Dick Van Dyke tripping over the ottoman at the beginning of every episode?). Well, comedy of manners is slapstick also, but slapstick *for* the living room. Its characters *know* that they are involved in an elaborate, largely artificial social dance of dialogue, dissimulation, and desire. Unlike the characters of simpler comedy, they watch themselves play out their absurdities, even as they realize they are powerless against the pull of the absurd. And the absurd is in the *little* things, not the pratfall but the *faux pas*: that's the world of *Pride and Prejudice*, and that's the world of "Seinfeld" at its very best.

How splendid to make the show's protagonist a stand-up comic, since stand-up is the boiled-down puree of comedy of manners: however outrageous, it can only (only!) be slapstick translated through the self-consciousness of language. In fact, all the major players in the cast are stand-ups: they know they're silly while they're being silly. It's a show—for once—where *nobody is dumb*, a show with clowns and no fools. That alone raises the ante—and the interest.

C.G. Jung famously described the unified self as a quartet, or quaternity, of mutually-tensioned personalities: the *Animus*, the striving, male part; the *Anima*, the nurturing, female part; the *Syzygy*, the "ego," organizing impulse; and the *Shadow*, the dark, feared, often-denied other inside all our dreams. Elaine who constantly screws up finding the right guy; George who constantly screws up finding any woman; Jerry, ironic and detached, who tries mainly to keep his balance; and Kramer, anarchic and maladroit (what the hell does *he* do for a living?) who nevertheless gets, as if by magic, all the girls and money and success everybody else wants—mainly by not even trying.

Jung would have loved this show. The four main characters are so perfectly a single, self-conscious self, so perfectly a comic projection of our own daily negotiations with the world, that it's difficult to believe the writers didn't, sometime, flip through a copy of *Psyche and Symbol*.

Well, actually, not so difficult. Comedy has its own wisdom, older and wiser—and more fully human—than psychology. "Seinfeld" just built, like all art worth the name, on an established tradition and came up with something new and fine. Did I invoke Jane Austen? That's only half-right. The fact is, "Seinfeld" is the kind of show that would have been written by Jane's kid, if she had married Woody Allen: and that is a marriage made in heaven.

Hip, bitter, and finally deeply generous, the show's wit and *Weltanschauung* is in the background of sitcoms like "Frasier," "Friends," and the splendid "Mad about You." And isn't it funny that, as our political and civil discourse becomes everyday more fifth-grade simplistic and coarse, comedies like these preserve an idea of civil speech—speech that saves our humanity while accepting our silliness?

Maybe life should sometimes try a little harder to imitate art. □

MUSIC

Joseph Gerics

A MELANCHOLY 'BOSS'

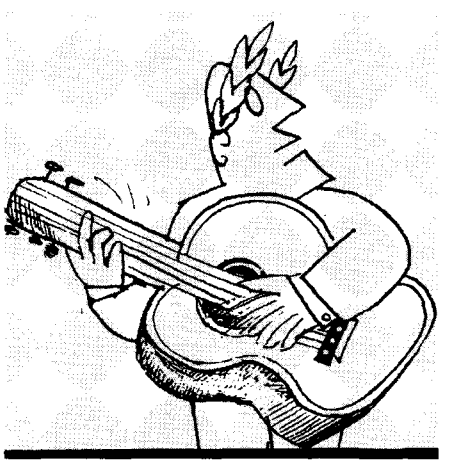
Springsteen's new sound

In 1975, New Jersey-born rocker Bruce Springsteen exploded onto the music scene with "Born to Run." As other hits followed, Springsteen swaggered as "The Boss" on albums and especially in concerts. A far different Springsteen takes the stage on his current tour, which opened two weeks before Christmas with shows in New York and Boston: no band, just a man with his guitar.

The reflective, even somber songs that dominated both evenings were uncharacteristic but not unexpected (most listeners were familiar with Springsteen's latest release, "Ghost of Tom Joad"). Describing *The Grapes of Wrath* as an inspiration throughout his career, Springsteen stressed that these new songs were written "with a lot of quiet."

Despite the optimism and self-confidence of earlier songs such as "Better Days" and "Thunder Road," Springsteen's best work (including "Hungry Heart" and "The River") has always had a hard edge of yearning and lost opportunity. Even the rollicking "Glory Days" stands just this side of sadness. A few of the new songs echo his former lust for the open road, with lines like "the highway is alive tonight," but this time there is no "Promised Land" and darkness comes to the fore.

The New York crowd resisted this melancholy, at times bitter, Springsteen. Its enthusiasm recalled previous tours and the pumping fists that greeted his biggest hit, "Born in the U.S.A.," a song misinterpreted "mostly by younger children and Republicans," Springsteen joked. This new show's raw, stripped-down version reduced his accompaniment on the last stanza to the rhythm of his first beating on his guitar, and ended bleakly, "Nowhere to run, ain't got nowhere to hide."



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The new songs concern the downtrodden, typified by a set about Mexican immigrants. "Balboa Park" and "Sinoloa Cowboys" describe death, through hustling and in a drug factory. A haunting song, "The Line," moves beyond mere journalism as a border guard wrestles with good and evil, deciding to help an illegal immigrant and her smuggler brother cross the border. The occasions of sin are similarly illustrated in "Straight Time," which portrays the struggle of an ex-con to stay straight while tempted by the easy money of his earlier ways.

Desperation characterizes the lives of the middle class as well. The persistent theme of Springsteen's new songs is suffering resulting from the workings of an indifferent and therefore immoral economic order. His stage commentary, nearly as important as the music, set the tone for each song. Here he described people as "slipping through the cracks" in a country "split down the middle," and wondered what it would be like if he, like his characters, had to "face my children if they needed food and clothing and I couldn't give it to them."

"Youngstown" is a wrenching story of a laid-off steelworker. Grief at the loss of a vision of the common good underlies this song; the protagonist laments that "we gave our sons in Vietnam and Korea, now I wonder what they were dying for." Explicitly theological language describes the furnace smokestacks "reachin' like the arms of God into a beautiful sky of soot and clay." Springsteen directly connects the economic lives of workers to their experience of meaning and purpose. Having exploited land, air, and labor, the capitalist "sir" is "rich enough to forget my [the protagonist's] name." The worker, left without job, prospects, and faith, clutches his "sweet Jenny" as he finds himself "sinkin' down." The hopelessness of his situation finally pushes him over the edge into despair: "When I die I don't want no part of heaven; I would not do heaven's work well. I pray the devil comes and takes me to stand in the fiery furnace of hell."

Such imagery reveals an artist struggling not only with the injustices of capitalism, but also with religious faith and the problem of suffering and evil. Springsteen's concert commentary made this theme explicit. Reflecting on the excesses of friends who had used hallucinogens, he disparaged their claims: "They said they saw God. I figured it couldn't have been him." Pausing for laughs, he continued, "It's probably a good thing I never did see God. I'd pick a fight with him."

Springsteen spoke of "real-life miracles," not violations of the laws of nature, but times when "a person does the right thing," and in so doing "changes themselves, and the world." One example is "Galveston Bay," set amid tensions between native fishers and Vietnamese immigrants competing for a declining shrimp crop. Having previously vowed revenge on an immigrant, a Texan sheathes his knife and forgoes reprisal, returning home to kiss his sleeping wife.

Similar images of tranquillity and love are rare on this tour. The new, prophetic Bruce may disappoint fans who recall earlier, exhilarating four-hour marathon concerts. Not only is this show spare in setting, sound, and duration, but Springsteen's laments for the working class and his yearning for social justice pack a different kind of punch. The pumping fists have been replaced by clenched hands and teeth. On this tour, Springsteen forces his listeners—the beneficiaries of American prosperity—to confront the victims of the conditions that underpin that prosperity. He notes Tom Joad's enduring presence, "wherever somebody's struggling to be free...[T]hat's what I want to do, bring some beauty and hope...some sense of the divine life."

Springsteen's songs have matured: first harnessing raw power and energy, then using narrative frames, then exploring commitment and relationships. Now, twenty years into his career, Springsteen intrigues his listeners with songs of existential anger and rebellion, religious doubt, and a search for faith and meaning. We await his next release for clearer notes of transcendence. □

Joseph Gerics *is chair of the theology department at Fairfield College Preparatory School in Fairfield, Connecticut.*

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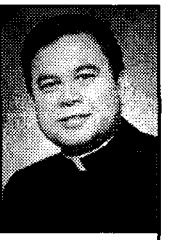

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The author is too much with us

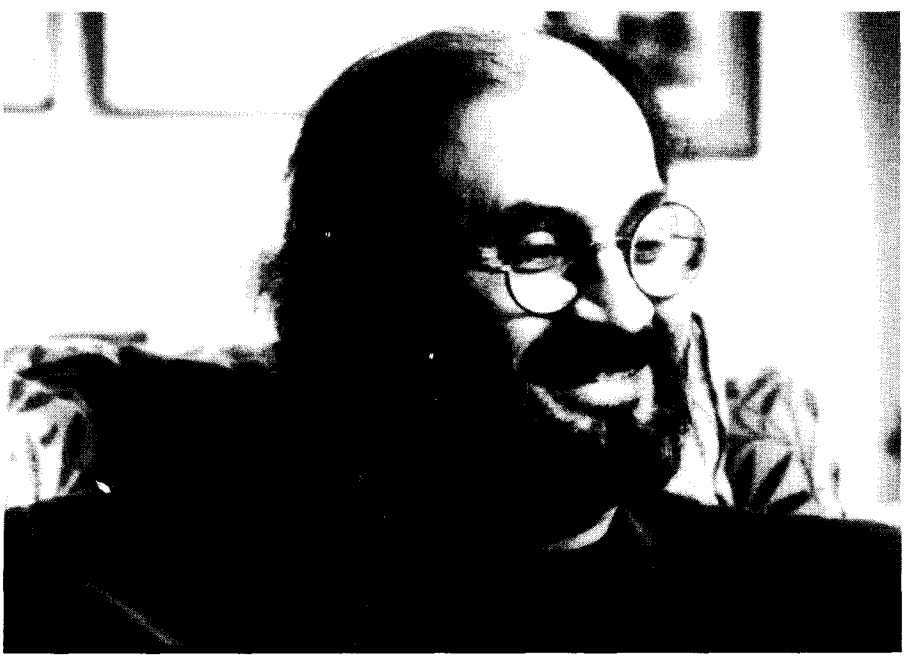
The Moor's Last Sigh
Salman Rushdie
Pantheon, $25, 437 pp.

Sara Maitland

Salman Rushdie is—and I think this can be said fairly uncontroversially—one of the most important English-language novelists currently writing. He has mythologized all our lives, and done so in the arena of multiculturalism and postmodernism. This is a remarkable achievement; and of course cannot be separated, in some important respects, from his own social boundary transgressions—he is the product of both a divided India and the British Public School system: Gandhi and *Tom Brown's School Days*; of Islam and the Booker Prize. Autobiography however is not the whole story—Rushdie has an extraordinarily bold imagination, in relation to both subject matter and plot and to language—as a nonrealist novelist myself I cannot but envy and admire the high-handed courage of his fiction.

It is therefore particularly tragic that it will probably never again be possible to read his fiction without thinking of his life: of the *fatwa*, of the international *cause célèbre*, of the fear, and of the years of isolation and abnormality. I do not want to suggest that all of this would not have mattered so much if he had been a lesser writer—terror is terror; but we, as much as Rushdie himself, may turn out to be losers here.

The Moor's Last Sigh is Rushdie's first major work since *The Satanic Verses* was published in 1988. (I do not discount *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, which was charming, and the collection of stories *East West*, which was odd—I just do not think they were "major.") I wanted to read it, indeed I disciplined myself to read it, with the same literary and emotional enthusiasm as I had brought to *Midnight's Children* or *The Satanic Verses*. I found, to my regret, that this was not possible. Some of this, frankly, was my own fault—I could not suppress a curiosity as to whether Jews would find themselves gravely offended at being re-stereotyped as the power behind an international criminal empire; or if right-wing Hindu nationalist parties were going to rise up howling with wrath and demanding blood for his satirical portrayal of them. (He is, let's face it, wonderfully wide-sweeping in his abusiveness.)



But some of it is Rushdie's "fault." How can he begin a novel, under all the prevailing circumstances, with the following sentence:

> I have lost count of the days that have passed since I fled the horror of Vasco Miranda's mad fortress in the Andalusian mountain-village of Benengeli; ran from death under cover of darkness and left a message nailed to the door.

and not expect a certain gossipy and distracting curiosity to rise up in the reader's mind? How can he choose a protagonist who is constantly being "imprisoned" and isolated by malevolent fates—starting from birth (genetics) with a unique physical deformity (a body that grows, and therefore ages, twice as fast as anyone else's—there is, by the way, such an illness; it is called Cockayne's syndrome) and continuing through family history, politics, passion, *and* art—all the world is out to get the Moor—and not expect his readers to draw some parallels? How can he take that old standby of romantic fiction, The Family Saga; give it exotic locations; start it with not one but two family weddings in 1900; and end both the novel and the family with a terrified man escaping prison to die—

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and not have his readers wonder if they are being given a rather monomaniacal view of the author's century?

What else is the poor author to do? All fiction has to come out of the interior autobiography of the writer, and this is particularly so with Rushdie's brand of magical realism. Perhaps, driven by real and exterior events, he is here attempting a brave act of satire, an ironized and witty self-reflection. If so, he has forgotten something crucial; satire has to have a critical, a cutting edge, and self-satire even more so. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a self-indulgent text.

There are some wonderful things, some real magic, in the book. Rushdie knows so many things, from so many cultures, and is so clever, both intellectually and linguistically. His driving sense of Indian history is persuasive to an outsider. His sense of place is lyrical. It is apparently not possible for him to do anything other than put together palpably gorgeous sentences and scenes. In particular the matriarchs are a splendidly eccentric and complex group of women: the hero's mother, an artist, has a precision, combining the "fairy mother" and the "wicked witch"—the good mother and the bad mother both at once—that gives her a universality that is infinitely moving. But Rushdie is better at mothers than at lovers: the pivot of the plot in many ways is the particular passion the Moor develops for Uma—she, the sex, her devious complexities, and her fatal attraction are all indicated with a curious absence of conviction. This creates a hole in the plot into which the novel seems to collapse.

Too much of the witty erudition looks suspiciously like showing-off. And even more often like a cover-up, a digression from a path that was ambling nowhere anyway. It is as though having recreated India as myth in *Midnight's Children* and given us a profound and moving mythological narrative for the experience of itinerancy, of immigrant-*ness* in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie now needed to mythologize himself: to find a huge narrative to inflate what must, necessarily, have been a lonely, scary, and miserable experience.

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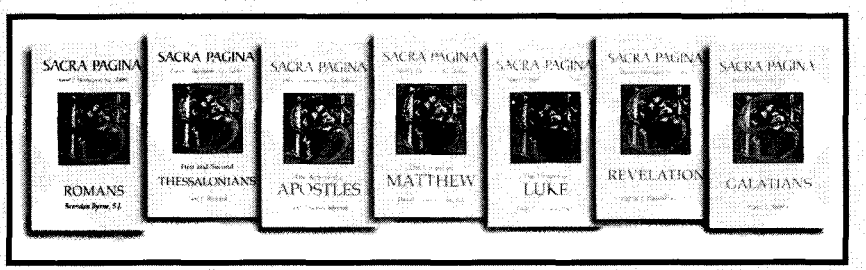

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You see. I have done what I did not want to do—I have written more about Rushdie than about the Moor. Perhaps, of course, this is my problem, not his; but I do not think so—I think it is both a historical inevitability and, more interestingly both the fault, and the essence, of the book: it is hard to write about the book—the plot is very complex and its significance is rather slight.

But, ah, he can still write. It is there. I think we must rejoice that *The Moor's Last Sigh* is written: it was never going to be an easy book for Rushdie. Now it is done. Obviously he is still there, the writer I mean, and has not been driven into meekness—a little self-grandiloquence, for a writer of this kind, is a great deal better than the opposite. I would wish him well if that were not quite so matronizing. □

Sara Maitland's *most recent novel,* Ancestral Truths, *is published by Henry Holt. In 1990, with Lisa Appignanesi, she edited* The Rushdie File *(Syracuse University Press).*

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A MUSCULAR PACIFIST

In Good Company
The Church as *Polis*
Stanley Hauerwas
University of Notre Dame Press, $29.95, 268 pp.

Patrick Jordan

Stanley Hauerwas, Methodist theologian and university professor, sometimes verges on the irreligious. I don't know of another American theologian who can have you laughing out loud while at the same time you're licking the wounds he has inflicted. He takes aim at not only the pretensions of the American Christian "project," particularly the liberal variety, but at the blessed self-assurance of the reader.

In Good Company, Hauerwas's eighteenth book, is a collection of thirteen essays, several coauthored, dealing with ecclesiology, ethics, and ecumenism. The book's subtitle, "The Church as *Polis*," serves as focus and impetus, although there are lapses. (It also happens to be the *title* of another just-released volume from the same publisher, a study of Hauerwas and Jürgen Moltmann by Arne Rasmusson. How's that for marketing.) The guiding argument in this volume, however, is more apparent and sustained than in Hauerwas's other recent collection of essays, *Dispatches from the Front* (Duke, 1994). "I am trying to foment a modest revolution," he writes here, "by forcing Christians to take themselves seriously as Christians." And *force* is a well-chosen word, for Hauerwas is one of those muscular pacifists who are never satisfied with simply inviting you to share his convictions but have to wrench your arm. Particularly when it comes to hammering liberals—theological, cultural, or political—Hauerwas takes no prisoners.

Still, Hauerwas is not insufferable. He's too lively, too engaging, enjoyable; and he's often right. He begins explorations with self-deprecating humor: "I am not unaware of the highly compromised nature of the church," he writes. "I am, after all, a Methodist." Or again: "I sometimes think the reason that Protestants, and in particular Methodists, are more likely to believe in the 'real absence' than the 'real presence' is that God just scares the hell out of us."

Now professor of theological ethics at Duke University, Hauerwas taught Christian ethics at Notre Dame for a dozen years, and has an appreciative but realistic sense of things Catholic. He also has a keen nose for secularizing tendencies—both in the churches and on campus—and doesn't hesitate to expose them. The churches in this country are in a missionary situation, he writes, because of the very culture they helped to create. And theologians shouldn't fear saying so because faith, by its nature, is "recriminatory."

With the dexterity of a Zabar's lox filleter, Hauerwas dissects American individualism and displays its deleterious influence on the churches. He comments on Robert Wuthnow's *The Restructuring of American Religion*: "Members of Protestant churches now depend less on belief in the particular theological and ecclesiastical heritage of that denomination than on how that religious organization provides a means for individuals to express their particular interests." Instead of being "gathered" by God and formed by a belief in the risen Lord, these congregations are increasingly voluntary associations of like-minded seekers. Catholics are scarcely better off. As they become thoroughly assimilated to American democracy, writes Hauerwas, they no longer possess a distinct and coherent Christian perspective and become less capable of or disposed toward challenging the *status quo*. He might applaud the Catholic bishops for a particular stand, but would rightfully ask where the rest of the Catholic people stand.

For Hauerwas, challenging the *status quo* is an essential aspect of being Christian. It requires not only right-minded individuals but committed groups. That means forming a "good company" of believers whose daily lifestyles make it a viable, inviting *polis* with a critical take on society. Only such a *polis* can provide its members with the skills needed for living faithfully: "I want to be part of a community with habits and practices that will make me do what I would otherwise not choose to do," he writes.

For Hauerwas, a church does not *have* a social ethic, it is a social ethic. That is why its liturgy must form its life and mission: "Worship is the most effective form of resistance to the powers who would dominate our lives," he writes. All of this can seem ill-defined—and at times it does in this collection—but it does not diminish the power of Hauerwas's message.

Hauerwas is decidedly contemporary—his ethical discussions include front-page items, and his books have sold surprisingly well for a serious theologian—but he is no postmodernist (and clearly no modernist). His criticism of liberalism is unrelenting and, as Max Stackhouse has pointed out (*Christian Century*, October 18, 1995), sometimes imprecise and misleading. But Hauerwas is evenhanded, spreading his wrath to supply-side economics and what he sees as the half-measures of natural-law ethics. While he praises John Paul II's *Centesimus annus*, he faults the pope for his romanticized notion of work and the way the pope construes biblical texts to weight an argument.

However, it is not Hauerwas's criticisms that are the dominant note in this work, but his notion of church as living community, called—and called to account—by Christ. That theme informs and braces every selection in this lively collection, and gives the reader the sort of workover one doesn't experience often enough when reading contemporary theology. □

Patrick Jordan *is the managing editor of* Commonweal.

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

vorable review [December 1], my wife and I saw the movie *Get Shorty*. We found it gross and repulsive. It began with the "F" word and then repeated it or one of the other four-letter words in nearly every other sentence of dialogue.

I am not a prude. I have traveled the world, served in World War II, and have dealt with people in all walks of life. Yet the movie offended me nearly as much as it offended my wife.

Reviewers should not endorse garbage. HERBERT H. KERSTEN, M.D.
Fort Dodge, Iowa

Critics on target

Please count me as a fan of your film and media critics. While I do not own a television or a VCR, I do occasionally go to the movies, and in my opinion the insights of Messrs. McConnell and Alleva are usually right on target.

Last summer my son and two friends talked me into seeing *Pulp Fiction*. I found the violence disturbing and at one point had to leave the theater and stand in the lobby. Nevertheless, there was something compelling about the film, just as there is something compelling about the Bible despite its many extremely violent, obscene, and ghastly passages.

Is *Pulp Fiction* an artistic and religious masterpiece? I am not sure. I am sure, however, that it is far less threatening to morality and human decency than *The Lion King*. My seven-year-old niece is responsible for my seeing that piece of cinematographic pulp. During the film I could not help wondering who in America decides which movies get an "X" rating. *The Lion King* certainly deserves one. I was shocked by the subtle racism, sexism, and homophobia (not to mention violence!) that permeates this so-called "wholesome family entertainment," and afterward felt that I had somehow participated in the moral corruption of a child. MICHAEL CHEW
Stuttgart, Germany

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THE REAL BIRTH OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

John C. Gebhardt

One reason—not the only reason—that I'm in favor of affirmative action is that my family and I, down to and including the third generation, have been among its beneficiaries. In our story, however, there's a difference: We're white.

It all began in 1952 in a former potato patch on Long Island that had been named Levittown in honor of the builder of tens of thousands of attractive and remarkably inexpensive four-room houses. Most of the purchasers were World War II veterans, as I was; but being a veteran was not a necessary qualification. Apart from being minimally creditworthy, there was only one requirement: To buy a house from Levitt in this area, one had to be a member of "the Caucasian race," which is to say, white. This *sine qua non* was written into a covenant that forbade even the resale of any Levitt house to a non-Caucasian. (In this respect, the Levitt Corporation merely went along with local custom; most desirable residential areas in Long Island—and in many other places in the country—followed the same policy.) Some years later, a Supreme Court decision nullified this clause in all deeds, but by that time Levittown had been established as an all-white community.

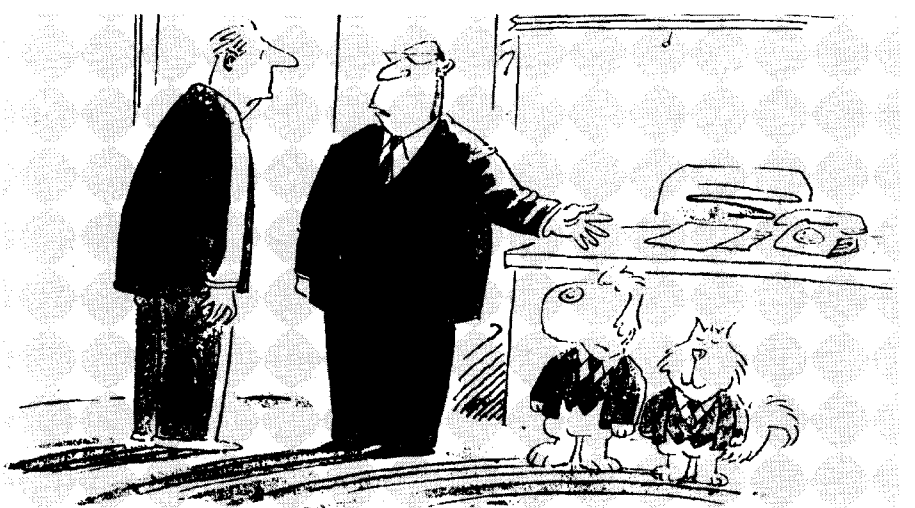
What a difference a clause makes. In Levittown, successful white applicants bought their houses with no down payment, only a good-faith deposit of $100 that was returned at closing. The federal government did its part by guaranteeing 4.5 percent mortgages for veterans; they flocked to the area by the thousands. By today's standards, mortgage payments then were laughably small: $57 a month paid off interest and principal over thirty years.

New schools sprang up in the area, so that my two children had the advantage of a safe and worry-free education, with lavish opportunities for participation in sports, musical groups, school plays, and field trips to museums in the city. There were sympathetic guidance counselors and special programs for both the gifted and the handicapped. When the time came, my children were ready for college, and both attended branches of the state university system at modest cost.

It was a quota system of sorts, with the figure for exclusion of blacks set at 100 percent. While we whites in Levittown enjoyed our short- and long-term advantages, with the sanction of society and assistance from the legal system and the United States Treasury, black veterans were consigned to rental apartments in the city, mainly on the mean streets of slum areas, breeding grounds for drug abuse and crime, where schools were hardly worthy of the name, where jobs—especially jobs with a future—were scarce and became scarcer.

For us whites, the benefits continue. In due time my children became college graduates, married, had children, established themselves in their own homes, having found it relatively easy, given their backgrounds, to find suitable employment. And, when the time came for me to sell the Long Island house and move to a co-op apartment in Manhattan, a crowning bonanza was realized: A house that had cost $8,000 in 1952 sold for $180,000 in 1986. As the third generation of the postwar Gebhardt family prepares to enter college, my grandchildren know that if help is needed for ever-growing educational costs, there is a reserve fund in place: one more benefit of affirmative action.

My ancestors never held slaves. My family never actively discriminated against African-Americans. I personally never did anything meant to hold black people down. But, like most other white families, mine passively profited from the economic, social, and political preferences and opportunities that were granted to us but withheld from people of color for decades and centuries. It would shame us today to oppose programs that attempt in some small way to right the balance. □



"Of course, I expect them to start at the bottom like everyone else."

John C. Gebhardt *retired as head of the English department at Fort Hamilton High School in Brooklyn after thirty-eight years in the New York City school system. He now keeps his hand in as a part-time teacher of aspiring teachers at Queens College.*

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Do Catholics have bad breath?

You'd sure think so, the way sneering cultural elites and the satanic secular press crucify us. As Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., observed, the belief that Catholics have bad breath is "the deepest bias in the history of the American people." We're just as much victims as anyone else, and don't you forget it.

Sadly some of our own leaders and teachers have done exactly that. Well-publicized quisling Catholics keep pretending that liberal post-Enlightenment culture has something to teach the church, even to teach the papacy itself! Flaky feminist nuns whine that the dignity of women is not perfectly represented by the Cardinal of Cardinals. Dissenting neo-Modernist theologians call for academic freedom, and cowardly clerics spoon out pop psychology about love rather than thundering good old anathemas.

We at the NEW OSTRICH REVIEW say: Enough! We lift high our heads for the Magisterium, for the papacy, for the Catholicism of the ages. We stand unashamedly with its saints, its martyrs, its popes, its crusaders, its popes again, its inquisitors. Well, maybe not the really rough inquisitors.

We at the NEW OSTRICH REVIEW refuse to be intimidated by the bigoted myth that Catholics are sheep. As Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., once observed, the idea that Catholics are sheep is "the deepest bias in the history of the American people." When we are asked, "Can Catholics think for themselves?" we unashamedly reply, "Is the Pope Polish?"

Can faithful Catholics embrace open discussion and free intellectual inquiry? At the NEW OSTRICH REVIEW we can and we do—provided, of course, the pope says we can. Fortunately he almost always does!

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